

# Gravity Hill





# *Gravity Hill* *Magazine*

*Editor*

Stephanie Kjelgaard

***Volume VI***  
*Spring 2010*

St. Andrews College Press  
Laurinburg, North Carolina

Ted Wojtasik, *Advisor*

Cover Art  
*“Lazy Day”*  
By Jeni Brett

ISBN #  
978-0-9843918-1-3

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*Dedicated to*

*Ronald H. Bayes*

Teacher, Mentor, Student, and Friend

## *Editor's Note*

First, thank you to all of the contributors to the sixth edition of *Gravity Hill*. In the past, this literary magazine has thrived because of the faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of the college. After five years of success on St.

Andrews' campus, *Gravity Hill* has opened its arms and started accepting submissions from the surrounding community. It is this community, — on and off campus — working together and exploring the arts, that has made the sixth edition of *Gravity Hill* such a success.

Secondly, I would also like to thank Ted Wojtasik and Emily Threkeld for allowing me the opportunity to work as editor for this edition. Also, thank you to Cate Johnson for answering any and all of the tedious and annoying questions: from grammar choices to formatting problems. Without all these people, *Gravity Hill* would not have come to its fruition.

Lastly, congratulations to this year's prize winners:

Marie Gilbert Award

*Galina Podolsky*

"A Simple Touch"

Editor's Choice Award

*Chella Glennon*

"It's a Thin Road Between Genius and Crazy"

Your hard work shines through your poetry and offers a lasting impression that should not be forgotten lightly.

Every poem, story, and piece of art has offered its own, unique flow to this edition of *Gravity Hill*. I hope you enjoy this newest volume and decide to contribute to the issues yet to come.

Stephanie Kjelgaard  
*Editor*

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  <sup>Ω</sup> Alumni

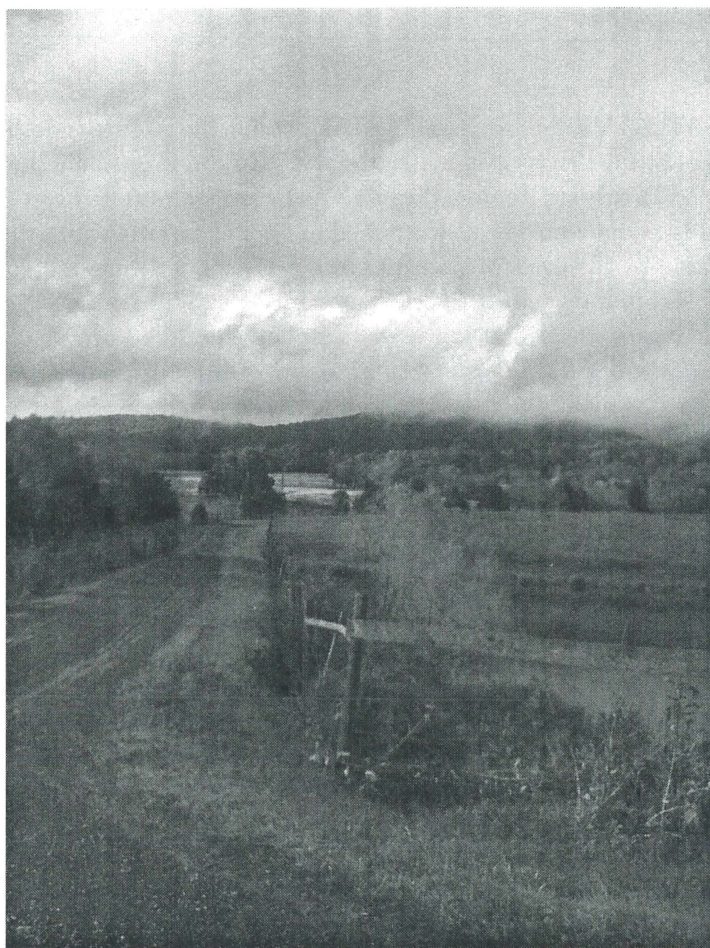


## *November Walk*

*Joe McGinley*

It is a narrow blacktop path pocked and cracked like the carapace of an ancient tortoise. It stretches out through the towering trees like the wavering, unsure line beginning a child's innocent drawing. Pines and oaks reach for the sky contending for the sun's copious warmth. On the ground the broken remains of a huge fallen pine, victim of drought and a turbulent, violent wind that sent it crashing to earth in a soundless scream. Bluebird boxes, now empty and forsaken, their tenants long gone in a feathery retreat toward a land where summer starts anew. The mockingbird dominates the scene, sends his strident message from atop the tallest conifer repeating borrowed notes from robins and wrens despite a faltering memory. Then to a sundial standing firm and solid, casting its thin, unflinching shadow measuring the passing hours, repeating its ageless message: time never slows, time never stops.

*Just One Bend*



*Blair Garnett*

## *Forgotten*

*Tyler Lee*

There's something tranquilizing about the countryside. It pulls at the heart strings just enough that you eventually find yourself driving down a deserted dirt road surrounded by fields and memories of what used to be, old farm machinery rusted by the rains of time and farmhouses once loved.

I found myself under that spell in the summer several years ago. The afternoon was warm and I cranked up my dad's old 1950 Chevrolet 3100 Pickup with my Chocolate Lab, Harley, ready to go in the back. The black ribbon I drove on was encompassed by hundreds of acres of hayfields on either side. I had no idea where I wanted to go. I longed to get lost on occasion, discover a time that would have otherwise been forgotten.

Hayfields slowly dwindled down until wheat fields took over. This was my place. After thirty minutes of passing through a flowing sea, I pulled off the road and parked under the shade of a large old tree. I envied the tree's position; set up on the top of a hill overlooking endless acres of pure honey colored wheat and nothing above except for the deep blue Arizona sky. The wheat was in constant motion with the gentle breeze.

An old ramshackle house that I had not noticed until now was hidden among tall trees. I walked closer becoming intrigued about the house and its stories. Its windows were shattered in the front and the front door was weathered and hanging off rusted hinges. I stepped in with Harley who was just as eager to explore the new place. Stairs leading to the second floor were broken in many spots, cobwebs took over

every nook and cranny in the house, and an old desk lay on its side on the west side of the house. Floorboards creaked under my weight as I stepped forward past the stairs and towards what I believed was the kitchen.

The view was probably what made this house so special. The kitchen was engulfed by sunlight; no corner was to be spared. A rather large spot where a window used to be captured a view that one could only imagine in movies. My dad's light blue truck and the large tree were off to the left several hundred yards away. I look harder and noticed that the tree had a tire hung by a rope that I hadn't seen before. The golden gently rolling hills of wheat flowed with the wind. I wanted this place to be mine.

Looking down, I almost did not believe my eyes: an old black and white faded picture sprinkled with dust lay at my feet. Brushing it off, I looked at it to see if I could get a glimpse into a life that was unfamiliar to me. A little boy, not much older than 5, held a homemade fishing pole with a tiny fish hanging off the end. He was grinning from ear to ear; the fish was his trophy. Perhaps it was the first one he'd ever caught. An old man stood behind him with a crooked smile.

I wanted so badly to put the photograph in my pocket and keep it for myself. However, it had been here for God knows how many years without being disturbed. I felt that it had to stay that way somehow. Perhaps if I took it out of this place, the house would lose all its charm and disappear into thin air. I placed it down in the same spot where I found it.

The rays of the orange sun caught my attention a little more than it had before. I looked and noticed it was starting to set. I walked out of the house slowly with Harley close behind. Taking my time walking through a piece of the field made me feel as if I was in a dream. I came to rest at the tire swing. Checking to make sure the rope was safe and that I wouldn't hurt myself, I climbed into the tire to swing for awhile.

I draped my arms across the top and gently dragged the

toe of my shoe on the ground to rock back and forth. Harley crawled under the truck to rest in the shade.

The love and yearning for a life like this runs deep in my soul. It's a feeling that can't easily be explained. The deadlines, pressure, and the constant racing around are things I'd rather deal without. To capture that freedom, peace, and beauty that surrounded me that moment would be the greatest gift of all. I can never understand why someone would want to give that up.

I stayed in the swing until the last bit of sun disappeared past the horizon. After that, I moved to the hood of the truck and leaned back watching the first bit of stars shine their light. I felt as if I was surrounded by friends who have passed on or are still alive; each one of their souls a star. The moon smiled down as its light blanketed the earth. I realized that times like these won't stay like this forever but for now, everything seemed possible and perfect.



*Father & Son*



*Lois Siegel*

*Generations*  
*Ryan C. Thompson*

the old have gone over the hills  
and into the mountains  
the young wander the valleys in between  
and the children lose themselves  
in their chosen abyss  
all follow the past,  
a past of illusions  
and muddled dreams,  
towards a forgotten future  
forever united  
by separate ways



## *Of Ghosts and Such*

*Shirley D. Jones*

Tenants who lived in the cabin  
On the hillside,  
Swore of hauntings  
They had witnessed.

We preyed upon one old man's  
Fears by hiding  
And making noise  
While he chopped wood.

He stopped splitting slabs with his axe  
And standing still  
Looked and listened  
To find the source.

Seeing nothing he resumed work  
But stopped again  
When he heard groans  
From the pasture.

Asking if he believed in ghosts,  
He said: "Yessum,  
I sure do cuz  
I heard a haint."

## *Click*

*Joe C. Miller*

I went to the future.  
It was bleak.  
I told my children.  
I told my friends  
that their future  
was bright.  
I said it had promise.

That's right,  
I lied.  
Then I cooked them dinner.  
I threw a party.  
It was festive.  
All to celebrate  
the glorious future.

I seasoned the food  
with strychnine.  
I spiked the punch  
with rat poisoning.  
How fitting it was  
to poison the rats  
in the midst of their race.

I know it sounds cold.  
I really think  
it was kinder  
than having a pistol  
stuck in your mouth.  
Then the trigger pulled  
until it goes  
click.

*It's a Thin Road Between Genius and Crazy*  
*Chella Glennon*

Bag lady Wanda  
A not so paranoid schizophrenic  
Is downtown Roanoke's most famous resident  
On any given day  
She can be found pushing her shopping cart  
Full of disembodied doll heads  
Up and down the tidy roads  
She calls them her babies  
She has names for all of them

My friend and I sit on the bench outside the  
Downtown Coffee Shop  
We sip our reasonably priced iced chai lattes  
And ignore the sweat collecting at our temples  
Bag lady Wanda parks her cart  
And plops down next to us  
She wears a blue knit hat and thick ski gloves  
We don't acknowledge her  
And bag lady Wanda does not acknowledge us

She removes a black plastic comb from her left glove  
And selects a grubby head from her cart  
Thoughtfully she begins to tease the synthetic once  
blond hair into a beehive  
She calls the head Molly  
We sip our tea  
Suddenly bag lady Wanda lets out a sigh  
Looking down at the head in her gloved hand she says  
"No books, no time, no friends  
Not a new idea all this week  
Even the bagpipe not undisagreeable"

*Pillar Play*



*Alexis Baker*

*Pop Art*  
*Mark Gretch*

The automobile showcase becomes an  
Art museum where the machine becomes  
The sculpture and tickets are sold to view  
The latest creation from the artist on the  
Production line in Detroit, where each  
Laborer signs his name, and the cars are  
Numbered as they roll off the production  
Line: one of 233,472.

Junk yards also become modern art museums  
Where the compactor squashes cars into  
Cubes. Back your truck up and take it home  
With you and place it on your lawn rather  
Than a pink flamingo. Better yet don't trade  
In that old jalokey, drive it up on the front lawn  
Paint it flamboyant yellow and invite the  
Neighborhood kids to take an imaginary ride  
In your taxi along with the mannequin taxi  
Cab driver. And how about the sculpting going  
On at the barber shop and salon? I can  
Remember looking in the mirror and sculpting  
My hair to look like Ed "Kookie" Byrnes on  
TV's 77 Sunset Strip. Yeah, we could sell tickets  
To that happening as well.

*Malcom Smith*

*Maureen Keathley*

They learned nothing when they sat in my classroom,  
staring dumbly at the clock, waiting for the bell.  
I tried to teach them, to show them the truth.  
I was forced to tell them their grandfathers were monkeys,  
but I also told them their grandfathers were men,  
upright-standing Christians with thumbless feet.  
They never came back years later to say, "Thank you,  
Mr. Smith. You changed my life; I know the truth now."  
Every one of them just watched the clock,  
waiting for the bell.

## *Mr. New River*

*Liz Monish*

Mr. New River  
hauls rocks to the still  
where he'll make  
the finest corn liquor  
in three counties  
grabs the copper tubing  
builds a condenser  
lights another cigarette  
on the end of the last one

Mr. New River  
never cards  
asks who your daddy was  
tells you a story  
about how they put pennies  
on the railroad track  
gives you a quart  
of the finest corn liquor  
in three counties



## *Artistic Expression*

*Alice V-Z Harrison*

Artistic expression, a mental regression back to everything  
which was seen,  
A plotting together, like patterns of weather,  
A journey through thoughts evergreen ...  
A sure imitation of every sensation,  
No feeling is absent at all!  
A thorough re-living of what did the giving,  
Indebted, you answer the call.

## *It's Like Writing a Poem*

*Chella Glennon*

Making good wine

When grapes are ready to be harvested, you can't hesitate

If they stay on the vine too long

They will get fungus, get eaten, or rot away

You have to make sure you pick the right kind of grapes

After you shake out all the bugs

You have to pull off all the dead, sour, and

fungus covered berries

Otherwise they ruin the wine

Once your crate is full

You have to make your way up a hill that is so steep

Dump the load in a bigger crate

And repeat the process until there aren't any more grapes

to possibly pick

It's hard messy work

Full of gross and sticky things

You are responsible for pulling the good from the bad

And there isn't any guarantee that people are going to like

what you have made

*Joy*  
*Joe C. Miller*

Where is the joy in a mango?  
The joy is in Africa  
in the eyes of an orphan  
who has nothing  
or does he have more?

Where is the spirit of giving?  
It is in the faces  
of two lovers in Africa  
sharing the beauty  
of God's waterfall.

These are signs of hope  
for the masses  
with unfulfilled expectations  
buried in the  
graveyard of  
disappointments.

Life is more than just  
the fleeting moment of a day.  
Taste the orphan's mango.  
Delight in the gift  
two lovers share  
in Africa.

## *Ashes*

*Ryan C. Thompson*

to you i'm already dead  
but don't bury me yet  
wait until the night  
then burn me to ashes  
with your passion once more

put what's left of me in your flower bed  
so my love will continue to grow  
and make you smile  
just as it did before  
when i lived in your heart

## *Valkyrie*

*Justin Thoby*

Your lips are my kind of debauchery.  
Like three dollar wine,  
Spilled across my  
Shaking fingertips  
In a fit of drunk laughter.  
Skip the fledging romance and  
Make me imbibe you.

Don't smile,  
Don't say a single word,  
Just breathe, close your eyes, kiss.  
I need you vulnerable,  
Rife with contempt, and spitting disdain  
In every direction,  
A fountain of sweet, strawberry venom.

Your armor blazes in the soft light,  
Something alive, something sinister,  
And I lurk,  
Prowling like a nightmare drawn to your scent.  
I've espied you alone, little valkyrie,  
And my intent is to devour.

Don't be placated,  
Don't let this slip away,  
Fuel yourself with wrath  
And I will only grow stronger,  
More driven by the desire to consume.  
I'll ply your flesh with my fingers,  
Pushing them into you, forcing apart the velvet curtain  
That conceals the sacred pool.

You are my kind of poison,  
Dripping words in caustic tongues  
To sear the skin and bare the bones,  
Tearing away at sinew and spattering bits of soul,  
Prometheus, granting me fire,  
Athena, calling me to war,  
Or something more primal.

Don't cry,  
Don't be afraid.  
As Marduk crafted man and earth  
From a carcass,  
Your body will build Babylon anew.  
Tonight, I wield thunder  
And we are as gods,  
Conceiving stars and spattering the sky  
With light.

*Olivia Taylor*

The window looked so soft and inviting  
He couldn't resist.  
He looked.  
There he is  
Standing awkwardly in front of her.  
Hands in pockets,  
Feet scuffling on the driveway.  
There she is,  
Leaning back against the garage door,  
Arms folded.  
Swinging her hair back,  
Confidence hangs all over her.  
She smiles, she laughs,  
She knows.  
She glances to that window and away,  
Making him feel as insignificant as a breeze across her cheek.



*Vogue*



*Sarah Karas*

*Again*  
*Tyler Lee*

Again  
A warm tear,  
silent cries of hope.

They're at it:  
Daddy's home late  
drunk with yesterday's  
whiskey.  
Poor mother —  
how she weeps  
and cowers from  
his flying hand  
as he calls her by  
the wrong name.

From upstairs, I hear  
glass shatter  
and I punch the pillow  
in the same fashion  
that daddy does towards  
little Maria  
when she comes to  
greet him at the door  
hoping for a tender hug  
after a long day.

Lacy barks;  
shush, little one,  
you don't want to  
have him go at you  
too.

*At Battle's End*  
*Justin Thoby*

A pile of severed limbs  
Lay upon the bloodstained earth,  
A cluster of cast-off toys,  
A child's discarded joy.

*Limerick*  
*Blake Allen*

These fucking Under Armour socks  
Stacked everywhere box after box  
All different sizes  
Socks I **despises**  
Whiskey on the rocks

## *Area Code To The Past*

*Mark Gretch*

He picked up the phone and dialed  
In the number to the past. It's a secret  
Area code only a few of us have.

How are your bones resting, Aunt Marge?  
I have pleasant memories of you. Thank  
You again for the stuffed poodle you bought  
Me while I was recovering from apendicitis  
Surgery.

Where did you disappear, Uncle Al? You  
Left us too soon.

I'd call you by name but you didn't have  
One. You were the miscarriage of Mom's.  
Were you my sister that I never had or  
Another Brother?

Grandpa Victor, if you would have behaved  
Yourself way-back-when you would have  
Been a part of the family, but instead you  
Were shunned, so I never knew you. I heard  
You were mean as hell, and you looked it  
In your photographs.

Mr. Rasp, how are you doing out there? I  
Just wanted to tell you that all the attention  
You lavished on me as one of your 7th grade  
Students was not wasted. I've turned out to  
Be a scholar. I miss your classroom.

Uncle Sy, you left without telling me more  
About your stint in the CCC's in Idaho. I  
Think you were 62 when you left us. I'm  
62 now as well. If you move again please  
Leave a forwarding address and a telephone  
Number where you can be reached, no matter  
How far the reach. I have the secret area code.

## *Crawl Inside Caramel*

*Courtney Butler*

If I could crawl inside caramel today —

I would

take a cup of coffee,

a stack of bad movies

and an armful of good books with me.

I would

snuggle down for the duration

and swallow sunlight on my way in,

so I have a light to read by whenever I smile.



## *Feathers*

*Kime Neal*

A large boulder, bigger than any he had seen by the river, sat on the hill. The stone was smooth sandstone and a map had been edged out of the top half. Underneath a message was chiseled: "Welcome Blessed One. Each raised portion can be reached by picturing yourself at the location. May your travels be fruitful."

Doble read it over until he had it memorized. His hands explored the map curiously, lingering on the raised sections. Travel had become a pressing need for him, a force that drove him, but he had no idea where it came from. If the stone could help assuage this desire, he would attempt its powers. The nearest raised area had a cliff and contained the upper portion of the river he had always known. Seeing where it flowed from intrigued him. He engrained the raised image in his head, put both hands to the drawing, then pictured it in his mind.

Doble's eyes began to strain from looking so hard at his fingers. His vision blurred the stone. He blinked to focus. The wind kicked up as he stared at the stone and put his hands on his hips. The stone stared mockingly at him. He reread the instructions at the bottom but could not figure out his mistake. He turned to pace awhile and his jaw dropped.

The rolling hills behind the stone were gone. The forest he had lived in was now open air. He stood instead on a rock cliff and far below him was a river and trees.

"Where did you come from?" He jumped. The girl's voice came from behind him.

Feathers filled his sight when Doble started to turn. Deep emerald green laced with patches of black. He stopped

turning and his fingers caressed the soft vane before his mind caught up. No one else had wings like he did. The feathers moved left and the rest of the girl appeared in front of him. Her hazel eyes glittered with an inner circle of yellow green. She scrunched her eyes and tipped her head to the side, causing her long waves of dark brown hair to fall over the lower half of her face.

"You have your own feathers to fondle." She reached out and smoothed one of his with her thumb. "Where did you come from? What's your name?"

She tried to lick her lips but caught a lock of hair. She removed it and straightened to a proper standing position. One hand clutched her hip and she successfully licked her lips. She stared down at Doble, two inches taller than him.

He pointed to the sandstone rock behind her. "Doble. What about you?"

"I've never heard of Doble. Is it far from here?" She looked around the boulder towards the horizon.

Doble huffed.

She turned back, grinning. "I'm Kinistra. I live on the other side of the cliff. Which plot do you come from?"

The map on this boulder was the same as the last, which made it easy for him to point out his home.

"Is it nice there?" Kinistra asked. Doble nodded. "Then why come here?"

"I've never been here," he shrugged. She stared at him. "I like to wander."

Kinistra eyed the boulder with a glimmer of a glare curling the corner of her lip. She turned quickly back to Doble.

"What do you do?"

"I don't know. I didn't know such a stone existed that can transport people. I'm still a little...." He switched his gaze to the sandstone map.

"You didn't know about the map? But it isn't the rock that moves you. It's just a map on a boulder that marks the

edge of the territory."

She was staring at him so he kept his eyes on the map. "What territory?"

"Of the Sacred Lands. Who do you hang out with?"

"Nymphs. They raised me."

Her eyes widened, "I've never met nymphs. They didn't tell you of your powers?" Doble shook his head. "Everyone who lives in the Sacred Lands has the ability to skip to any other plot of our lands. On the map it was the raised sections. You can leave from anywhere in one part but when you transfer somewhere new you arrive at our border — the rock."

"That's weird. If it works one way I don't understand why it shouldn't the other. We should be able to appear anywhere."

"Just the way it is. Maybe they don't want people landing on other people."

The sun was setting behind the cliff Kinistra had pointed to as her home.

"Oh, it's late." Doble stretched his arms up and yawned.

She flexed her wings and glanced towards the sun. "You should probably go."

"Are you here often? I mean, I didn't know if you have other things you are supposed to do usually."

"I'm usually around somewhere exploring."

Doble kept switching his glance between her face and feathers. "Could I come again? It was nice to be with you."

"Anytime."

She smiled and Doble smiled back as his chest warmed.

He went back the next day and almost every one after that. They explored and she taught him about powers and the Blessed Ones. He told her about plants, repeated both funny and weird stories he had heard from the nymphs. One day they sat beside the waterfall, midway up the cliff.

"I'm ready to fly," he said.

She giggled, "What, so soon?"

"They seem big enough." Doble stared at his wings curled around him. Then he stood on the path. "I'm going."

"No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to laugh. Don't go home. The day is just past beginning."

"I'm not going home." He stretched his wings out to either side.

She gasped. "But my parents—"

"Don't have wings. Nice people, but they don't know."

"But it could be dangerous."

"The pool is deep. If nothing else, I get a little wet."

She started to stand but he leaned forward, and glided off the cliff. Wind buffeted him and he swerved precariously as he circled down. Loose rocks showered him as he scraped against the cliff. His heart pounded but the view was exhilarating. He landed on the shore barely missing the water. His palms pressed into his knees as his lungs heaved.

He turned back and shouted up to Kinistra, "It was great!" She stood on the cliff where he had flown from. "Come on!"

Kinistra shifted her weight back and forth, spread her wings, and leaned into the open air. Her wings pressed up, almost audibly, and she plummeted.

His heart fell with her. All his joy in flight was suddenly squeezed out of him as if a hand clutched his throat.

Her wings flashed open, parallel to the ground and she glided out from the rocks, still angled slightly down. She soared right into the water and switched seamlessly to swimming. When she reached shore he helped pull her up.

"Are you okay? I'm such a moron. I shouldn't have told you to do it. It was pure dumb luck I didn't crash."

She pushed wet black-looking curls from her cheeks and tucked them behind her ears as her eyes met his. "Let's do it again, I think I can get it this time."

At the end of the successful day of flight they flew to the top of the waterfall and sat on the upper plateau. The water had been thunderous when Doble had first visited three

seasons ago. It had disappeared in the winter, but now it had turned from a trickle to a respectable stream. The moon had risen early over the trees by the pool below, and the sun was still sinking behind the rocky plateau. Doble picked a few leaves from Kinistra's hair and then they leaned against each other with their backs against a rock. He rested his hand palm-up on his leg. Her fingers intertwined with his.

"That was wonderful. What next?" Doble leaned his head on her shoulder.

"You usually head home now. Do you have to go? I hate it when you leave. I miss you." She put her head against his.

"I miss you too." His throat was hard, like a lump had been wedged into it. They sat for a moment in silence. "I won't leave tonight."

They lay down when the sky darkened enough for stars; only a few wispy clouds scuttled in the way. Kinistra rested her head on Doble's chest and they lay in silence, almost half asleep.

"Help! No, please don't! No!" a woman screamed.

Doble turned to Kinistra but already knew it wasn't her. He stood and looked around but saw no one on the plateau. The voice had been too close to have come from farther away. He sat and held Kinistra for a while.

"Anything, please, anyone! Help! I beg! What must I do? Please just help me!" a man yelled.

This time he just looked around but Kinistra noticed.

"You hear them now too, don't you?" she asked.

"Them? The voices?" he asked. "You hear them too? What is it?"

"The last of our powers to be delivered. The end of the age of truth, or the beginning some call it." She spoke softly with a somber voice he had never heard her use. "Mostly humans, all in need of help. They shouldn't call us Blessed Ones, rather Cursed."

"How long have you...."

"Days."

"What do we do about it?"

"I just want to be with you," she said. "But I can't let them go unanswered."

"Then, we'll go together." Doble hugged her closer.

She shook her head. "Who did you hear before?"

"A woman, then a man."

"I heard a child, and then a woman just out of childhood." She grabbed him tighter, digging her nails into his shoulder. "We aren't meant to stay together."

"That, I don't believe."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out two miniature feathers encased in silver on a chain. "I made these for you from my baby feathers. Silver like the moonlight you love. A sign to know I am always with you."

She looked startled.

Kinistra took the feathers gingerly and put them around her neck. She then took two gold feathers out of her pocket. "Like the sun you gather strength from."

"Try to meet here every full moon until we set up something better," Kinistra said.

Doble nodded.

"I'll miss you."

They flew in different directions, clutching their pendants, but hearts heavy.



## *A Simple Touch*

*Galina Podolsky*

The slightest touch, a feather's fall creates  
A ripple. Speeding through the water,  
Every molecule set alive, placed in motion.  
One wonders how something so small causes  
An entire lake to feel such a gentle stroke.  
Your hand, gliding down my shoulder,  
Slowly trying to reach my fingertips.  
You close your fingers around mine without a word.  
My breath stops, your lips kiss the side of my cheek  
While your face flushes a burgundy red.  
The sense of your breath next to me,  
Your touch, your kiss ... my body's set alive.

## *Heat*

*Courtney Butler*

Whir, click. Whir, click. The heater would make its rounds turning and then click into place. It didn't swivel all the way around, like an owl's head. It looked like it was shaking its burning face at her, kneeling in front of it, hands extended, Go to sleep, it seemed to implore, you need to rest.

The young woman crouched. The only light in the room coming from the heater, the harsh glow illuminated the dark veils under her eyes and resigned set of her lips. Couldn't sleep again. Not enough dreams. Another four hours until dawn. Not that anyone could tell here, with the cloudy relentless autumn, the rain never letting up. Feeling her legs cramp, she stood and walked about the room, rubbing the small of her back. Whir, click. Whir, click.

The drab, mustard-colored curtains swayed slightly with her movement. Moisture fogged the edges of the windows, obscuring the town below. Why did she come here? Why here? No sun, no warmth. No family. No work had happened either, after the first month, when darkness settled in. Just sitting in front of the heater at night or pacing, the artificial warmth slapping her ankles alternately. She hadn't been sleeping. The closer it got to the twenty-first of December the less she slept. Tonight she hadn't slept at all. She oozed through her day, the waxy edges of her self merging effortlessly with each passing minute.

She circled the date on her calendar. Seven days until the longest night of the year and the first official day of winter. There was light on the other side. The darkness would start to let up. Maybe even the rain would stop. She pulled her orange bathrobe tighter around her thin frame and settled in front of the heater again. It swiveled to look at her. She hit



stop. The heat waves cascaded over her face, making it throb. She closed her eyes and her lips softly parted. Perspiration beaded around her forehead. Her skin started to turn ruddy. The freckles that had been smudged out after the first few weeks had reappeared across the bridge of her nose. She kept her face as close to the heater as she dared, half-hoping her skin would blister. Then she yanked away and turned the heater back to its swivel. It shook its head again.

She pressed her cold hands to her face, but too soon did the warmth seep out of her cheeks and her freckles disappear. She curled up on the floor, pressing her face to the rough, thread-bare carpet that covered the floor in faded rouge. It was heated slightly. She breathed in the scent of musk and closed her eyes. It smelled like the concrete of her driveway after the first summer rain had come. She used to lie on the driveway as the rain powdered her skin and the earth around her sighed in relief. She could feel the heat lift off the concrete; collected there all day long, it would remain warm until after the sun went down. The rain made her face and chest clammy, but her back felt the heat waft into her skin. Hot summer days were relieved by the monsoons. Late afternoon showers would cool the neighborhoods and fill the arroyos with water. She ached. She used to love the rain and wait for it every year. Usually by that time her face and shoulders were covered in freckles. Her entire body three shades darker and her hair streaked with sun. Even in the dead of winter, the sun would shine bright. All you had to do was turn your face up in the desert. So simple.

But not here. Here there was rain; relentless, unapologetic rain. The darkness was soggy and cold. It made your marrow freeze and your blood ice-over. There was nothing warm here. No heat, no will. Where had her passion gone? It had leaked out of her toes during the countless nights she spent pacing, coloring the red carpet as a candle. The young woman shivered on the floor. She opened her

eyes into black. The heater was dark, no movement. She hit the switch. Nothing. No click. No whir. Quiet. She jumped up and strode restlessly in the dark.

Heat. Heat. She needed heat and light. Eyeing a stack of books she had yet to read for classes she couldn't recall attending, she tied her robe tighter and began stacking them in the middle of the room. After there were a few columns about three feet high, she went to her desk and brought out some matches. Opening the books at the top, she carefully lit the first pages aflame. After some gentle coaxing, the books smarted to life with crackling fire. Gigantic torches of wasted knowledge. The planes of her face shifted into a hesitant smile. It was warm.

She gathered up old journals and notebooks, adding them to the pile. The blaze grew, igniting the books below. She loosened her robe and laced her hands on top of her head, rocking back on her heels. Smoke was starting to fill the room. She walked over to the windows and threw them open. She walked around her fire, tossing a few things here and there into the flames. Feeding the heat. Warmth seeped through her body and made her bones turn to fluid. Walking over to the window, she leaned out. Smoke billowed from behind her. She turned her face up to the sky. The fine rain misted the skin of her bubbling face and arms. She sighed in relief.

When they broke down her door and put out the flames, they found a discarded bathrobe covered in cooling, white wax. The window was open and there was no body below. She'd finally melted away.

## *Everyone Leaves Things Behind*

*Jean Jones*

Everyone leaves things behind,  
Scraps of it for miles and miles ....  
A friend once told me  
that Hell is the place  
where everyone goes  
to find the things  
they've left behind,  
scraps of it,  
for miles and miles ....

*Hypothermia*  
*Alexis Baker*

Have you ever stuck your hand  
into water that was so cold  
that it burned you?

That's how I feel when you  
look at me; this freezing heat  
that, when I stare too long,  
makes me feel drowsy  
and secure.

What a talented liar you are.

*Agricultural Aesthetics*



*Blair Garnett*

## *I Almost Lost Me*

*Janice Morrison*

Once upon a time I  
Met a charming man who  
Swept me off my feet with romantic words like  
Baby you know I love you and  
Girl, you know I will nevah hurt you  
Like them otha clowns  
Like  
Disney on the fourth of July and  
Paris all 24 hours of Valentine's day  
His love  
Was like a five star event  
I mean  
Shopping sprees, new shoes, diamonds  
And platinum rings, good love and good food  
In some time blindness found me and  
Led me through ignorance not  
Allowing me to gain experience so I'm  
In the passenger seat on I-95  
When all the doors locked and the radio  
Cut up and  
His left hand holding the steering wheel and  
His right hand pinching my thigh  
And screaming from those sweet lips  
About the episode a few minutes ago in the restaurant  
And  
"Is that what you had said?"  
So I  
Beg for *his* forgiveness even though  
I did nothing wrong and  
In between sobs and the tear drops

He bought me a brand new car  
I mean, girls,  
A 5-speed, sunroof and leather everything  
The chrome on the bumper was like  
*bling bling*  
So I find myself on my wedding day  
Questioning myself *is this the right thing to do*  
So self answerd myself,  
"But I love him" and  
"I can't hurt him" and  
"He'll change once we get settled in"  
*but*  
How do you lay down the law  
Without going over "the line"  
New house, new city new friends  
How dare I?  
I had no reason to whine, to complain  
*fight back*  
After every slap he unleashed the score card  
From "once upon a time" to  
The punch in the ribs that earned me a trip to the ER  
He was keeping a tally of all the things  
He bought me  
Reciting the gifts *he* bought for me  
Laughing at the timberlands I bought for him  
I owed him ... was indebted to him  
Felt guilty for rolling my eyes at him  
And  
Going to the store without  
Telling him and  
Not showing him that I had taken my birth control pill  
Fuh Real  
Or cleaned the blood from my lip off the bedroom mirror  
So I  
Almost lost myself  
As I sank into the bathtub I



Cried out to God while I  
Fought this battle within myself to  
Sink below the cucumber melon bubbles and  
Not come back up

*or*

Take a hand full of his prescription sleeping pills and  
*not come back up*

So I

Laugh to keep from crying

I

Live to keep from dying

I Almost lost myself

During his madness

In his punches

Through his promises

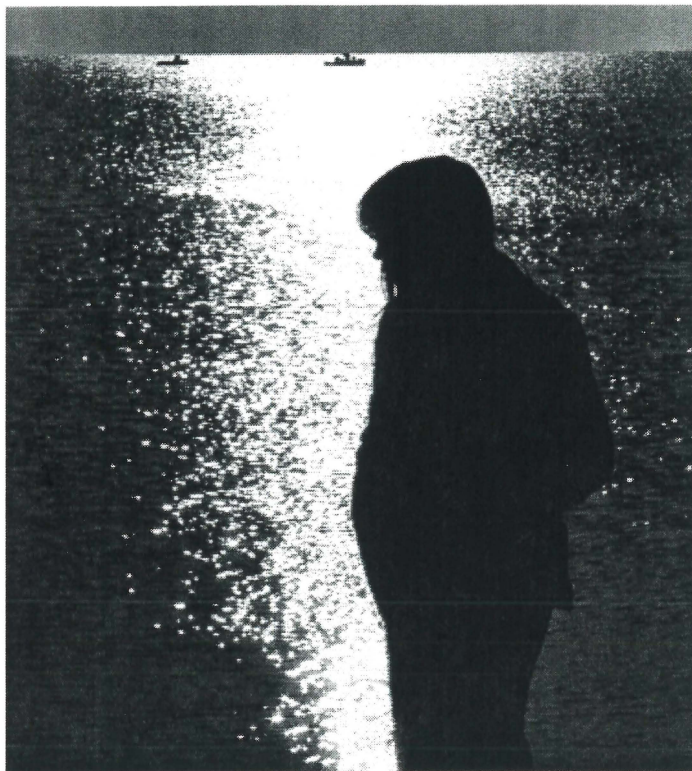
After his kisses

Under his timberlands

I Almost Lost Myself



*Valencia*



©

*Lois Siegel*

## *Shift*

*Matthew Poletti*

This soul is no longer my own,  
Tainted, different, and altered,  
All the values, morals and ethics gone,  
And what is left, is me.

## *Cowskull*

*Jean Jones*

In a room filled with potato smoke,  
a red-eyed boy listens  
to a woman  
with grey hair  
tell a story  
of watching stars  
in Missouri.  
The woman's eyes  
have the gravity  
of black holes.  
She cannot blink  
and stars rush towards her,  
like hawks, stooping.  
"Will you grow old?"  
the boy asks.  
"When the hair goes,"  
she says.  
Nothing changes  
Pictures remain the same,  
year after year  
the cow skull  
near her bedroom  
is the same color  
it was  
four years ago,  
and right now  
for the moment  
the boy's eyes  
and the woman's  
are exactly  
the same.

## *The Knight and the Stag*

*Maureen Keathley*

Long ago, in a kingdom far away, there lived a brave and noble knight by the name of Valen. This knight had no interest in love or marriage; instead he concentrated on taking care of his lands. In this respect, his people were quite satisfied, but as the years passed, they grew worried that he would have no heirs to carry on treating them fairly and with dignity.

The knight eventually listened to this concern, and thought it would do him no harm to take a wife. There lived a lady, Astore, whose lands neighbored his and whose thoughts were equally turned from love. To all the people of their lands, they were a fine pair indeed: he was strong, brave, handsome, and generous, and she courtly, kind, and beautiful. And so Valen and Astore married, and they lived for some time in harmony and indifference.

The knight enjoyed hunts as well as administration and tourneys, and it happened that on one particular hunt a large white stag crossed their path. Knowing that to kill such a creature would be a great success, he and his men followed after it. At last, the stag stopped before a small glade and looked the knight in the eye. Before he could draw his bow, however, the stag bounded away, revealing a maiden seated in the glade, her back to the group of hunters.

The knight's spirits lifted then, and he felt as if he had succeeded in his hunt, if only by receiving an arrow to his own heart, for he immediately fell in love with her. Desiring to be alone with her, Valen ordered his men away and entered the glade when they left.

"Maiden," he said, stepping into the glade, "who are you? A white stag led me here, and I have found you."

"I, too, was brought here by such a creature," she responded, not turning. "Did it mean for us to meet?"

"Perhaps." He wondered still who she was, but did not press her, as she did not ask him about his identity. They remained in the glade for some time together and at last planned to meet again another day. Then they parted, with some difficulty, each never having seen the other's face.

They continued to meet in this way, the knight's love for the maiden growing with every passing day. He sometimes caught a glimpse of the white stag in the vale and silently thanked the creature for bringing them together. His thoughts continually turned to her; eventually he could neither eat nor sleep for his longing to see her face. Still, even as he grew weak and gaunt, he refused to ask for her love, content only to speak cordially with her and gaze at her back. As their relationship progressed, he paid less and less attention to his wife. He had never felt much concern for her before — she could take care of herself — but the staff noticed that as time went on he became more and more distant and his health declined considerably.

On what he felt was surely their final meeting, Valen could barely make it to the glade, collapsing as soon as he saw the waves of sun-colored hair cascading down her back.

"Maiden," said he, "I beg you. Allow me to see you and give you my love. I have thought solely of you since we first met, and I fear I will die if I cannot have your love." With this he closed his eyes and let his head drop.

He heard the sound of quick footsteps on the grass and soon felt a small hand on his back.

"My love," she whispered, "do not treat yourself this way! Look at me."

He lifted his head and opened his eyes, at last able to see the woman he loved kneeling by his side.

She was no maiden: she was his wife.

"Astore?" he asked, not certain whether to be appalled at her intent to dishonor their marriage or pleased that he had

not managed to do so himself.

"Valen?" she answered, standing.

Relieved, he rolled onto his back and sighed. Despite this new discovery, his strength had not returned, and this took a great deal of effort. "To think you were so close to me all this time."

"Save your strength, Valen," she said. "I will return soon." She hurried away from him, but returned quickly with a veritable feast of berries and fruits for him.

They ate together in the glade and finally decided that the fact that they were married to each other was a boon. They agreed to carry on their clandestine meetings as before, so as not to worry the knight's staff with any sudden changes in behavior.

Their efforts to hide their new love quickly escalated. Rather than walk the corridors of his castle to his lady's chamber, Valen would, in the dead of night, climb to her balcony for a rendezvous. They exchanged messages by way of birds or trusted servants, and frequently arranged to meet in the glade where they discovered one another anew.

The knight's health improved quickly, and the servants noticed this, despite his secrecy. They also found the lady's sudden and persistent happiness to be unusual, and presumed that both were involved in extramarital affairs. Such was not their business; as long as their masters were happy, the servants held their tongues.

Valen and Astore remained happy for years, never growing tired of secret messages and late-night trysts. The white stag continued to visit them in the glade, watching them from afar. At times the knight saw the stag while out hunting, but he always ordered his men to let it alone.

Years and years after their first meeting, the white stag once more passed before Valen while he hunted. The knight ordered his men to stay behind so he could follow the stag alone.

The stag led him to the glade. There stood his wife,

waiting patiently. The stag stopped by her side and looked up at her. Astore looked back at it, and the stag turned to watch Valen.

He dismounted and began to walk toward them. The stag had never stayed in one place so long. Perhaps it finally wanted to hear thanks from them. Valen tried to think of something eloquent to express his gratitude, but he did not have time — head lowered, the stag charged him, piercing his thigh with its antlers.

Shocked, the knight stared at the stag, red blood running down its antlers. No longer able to support his own weight, he sank to the ground and watched as the stag walked back to Astore, transforming into a man as it walked. The lady's new companion was a red-haired knight wearing shining white armor. They embraced lovingly as Valen died.

The white knight carried his lifeless body back to the castle, and they told a story about an attack by a fearsome beast. They portrayed the white knight as a man who came across Astore weeping over her husband's lifeless body, comforted her, and returned him to his home. After an appropriate period of mourning, the lady married the white knight, her true lover, and they loved each other to the end of their days.

## *In the End*

*Jean Jones*

all that's left  
is a hasty phone number scrawled  
on a piece of paper,  
the smell of a musty bathroom,  
a strand of hair,  
and a used bedroom  
despite the best  
of intentions.



*Banking*

Mark Gretch

He stashed his money in the bank,  
Unfortunately it was a sand bank  
And when the tide came in the money  
Ran out

# *A Formula for Disparate Contraries (I, II, III)*

*Parrish Ravelli*

## **I. Measurement**

Wage is defined as the value of what we provide.  
Yet value, in any circumstance

Can only be measured by adjacent quantifiers.  
(Many of which trickle down to money

though not always currency.) If not defined by oneself  
or another, what then?

How parallel is a scale of intrinsical degree?  
What is my time, my minutes — hours worth

to me,  
as compared to what I am paid?

## **II. That Addition of Grace**

In this world, we are denominators  
of those things created

and those things bestowed upon us:  
science, religion, art.

We are meant to unite,  
yet we strive to be distinguished,

set above, separated. We can succeed  
under a common desire for progress,

a common passion for beauty,  
through an uncommon measurement of success.

And what has been accomplished  
without Grace,

the absense of which creates  
a culture of stagnant progression

### III: The Formula

*I am to X as  
You are to X*

creates a cultural imbalance  
and injects politics into personal expression.

Instead, *I am to X  
as You are to Y,*

with the addition of Grace,  
creates a formula of social and cultural liberty,

a universal disposition of progress  
and empowerment.

Society does not exist to measure greatness,  
but rather to engage mediocrity.

*Warped*



*Tyler Lee*

## *The Gates of Dis*

*Jean Jones*

Heaven is a frozen lake,  
like some water treatment plant  
that has been frozen over  
during the month of January  
near Lake Erie in Cleveland,  
its souls frozen over with no flow  
going on between God's designs  
from one side of Paradise  
to the other,  
and Dis is a piece of frozen tundra  
too clogged with waste  
like some ash-covered Treblinka, or Bergen-Belsen  
the ashes of its dead too frozen to go on,  
the trains long since broken down  
and the new arrivals,  
the souls of all the newly dead,  
they lie screaming about in space  
spinning out with no point or reason to guide them on their way  
We need to talk to God to get these things to work again  
Get these plants working again  
because we've stopped believing in Heaven, and Hell,  
and as a result, these ancient, antique relics of our afterlife  
lie frozen and dormant in our thoughts  
like some ancient Roman aqueduct  
no longer in use  
We need to believe in  
these places  
to get things moving again,  
to fix the clog,  
otherwise, new visions of the afterlife will replace them,

like the Tibetan Wheel of Life,  
with all of its  
heavens, hells, and rebirths  
spinning on  
like some perpetual wheel  
at a carnival that never stops moving,  
or some Moslem Heaven  
which, according to my father and my fantasies  
is filled with herds of beautiful naked women  
all open to prey  
for marauding bands of male predators like myself  
or the hells of Leviathan, and Pinhead, and the Box,  
where the former humans  
come out with their whips, chains, and hooks  
come to torture other humans for sexual pleasure ....  
We need to believe in some place for us to go to  
when we die,  
otherwise the charred ash heaps of Dis will  
continue to lie chocked  
and clogged  
with too many souls to give us all hope  
and Heaven will be too much like a frozen  
water plant during the  
month of January near Lake Erie to comfort  
our despair ....

## *Pro Re Nata*

*Blair Garnett*

Two hundred and twenty-two years ago the United States Constitution was ratified. Let us form a more perfect union! Today we are at war with terror. Whether that means we fight our own demons or others I do not know. *O bright Apollo, what god, man, or hero shall I place a tin wrath upon!* It seems silly, so silly, to war with terror. How can one fight terror, for fighting requires terror, does it *not*? *Unprepared young burdened with records, a tangle of works unfinished*, wars streaming together seamlessly across the history of humankind. We have been at war for democracy, for freedom, and now for terror. We have killed, maimed and destroyed to ensure, secure, and stabilize. *To confess wrong without losing rightness (and as to why they go wrong, thinking of rightness)*, war on terror is a paradox not soon to collapse, for one tends to fuel the other: terror ignites war, and war terror.

*O helpless few in my country, o remnant enslaved!* I am alone, but I am never by myself, for living is a state of most alienated yet never isolated. *And no one knows at sight a masterpiece*, the impeached Nixon once proclaimed, *give up verse, my boy, there's nothing it!* Even to write myself escapes me; I escape myself, ducking and dipping, twisting into shadows and melting into others, others inside me that keep me from myself but are myself. How can this be? Am I not me? I think I am, think I might be, but I think therefore I suffer; therefore you and this war need not exist at all. To be is not to be, necessarily, and is not even a question but a statement. The light dazzles and blinds, dazes me: I reach for a reprieve, but shade will not suffice. *I cannot make it flow thru.* Reality cares not for the lens used, the shelter sought—

it crashes through, ought it not? *A little light, like a rushlight, to lead back to splendour* (the cave was nice, just that). Poetry, prose, *all these borders of ideas, these edges uncertain but a means of blending, this urge to convey the relation of eye lid and cheek-bone by verbal manifestations.* I long to go back down to the cave where, "*some cook, some do not cook, some things cannot be altered,*" back before this war or my knowledge of it, of the other, of the self (or selves?). But the memories, this knowledge of thought, have made me and now lift me from the darkness only to show me there is no light, only gradience gradually gaining gusto as I go.

But *no! There is nothing! In the whole and all, nothing that's quite your own.* The Cartesian self is but many selves, awoken from the depths of Plato's lair, and thoughts and memories are more than you or me — *are you and me, and all of humanity. Yes, this is you — and me — and perhaps I am starting to see. Starting to see how some believe pro domo, in any case. Starting to see their return from this war on terror, this war of terror — with fear, as half-awakened, they move tentatively, uncertain, perhaps once lovers of beauty now starved and thwarted with systems, helpless against the control.* They dream of death, are stalked by its possibility, are strangled by its presence. I wonder who told them, *pro patria, non dulce non et decor.* Sweetness is milk mingled with honey. Death rots, and leaves not a trace of sweetness on the tongues of the deceased. And so I echo this warning — *pull down thy vanity, this usury age-old and age-thick, these liars in public places. Root it — them — out! We must pull down this vanity, for see how mean we hate when fostered in falsity? How some in fear, learning love of slaughter, come home then to a lie, to many deceits, to a made courage, or a made order, or made grace?*

I want to scream. *Pull down thy vanity. I say pull down!* But they won't, can't, see not its existence at all. My eyes grow larger and keener till this VANITY is all I can see. Whose world do I see, whose vanity? Mine or theirs, or is it of none? The days begin to stream together and at times it feels



as though this world is a timeless void into which I have fallen without realizing I have done so. Nine years have passed since we embarked on this war of contradictions. It all seems so far away, so removed from my life here today where I walk across the bridge to class in the predawn light, laden with books and papers, and iPhone and iBook, not a trace of *this half savage country* in sight (for where is the civility, the rationality in warring on terror?). *All things are flowing, Sage Heraclites says, but a tawdry cheapness shall outlast our days.* At night I cannot sleep with the air-conditioning redefining my bedroom climate. The cold, processed air feels alien in my lungs, on my skin, when welcomed into my body. It seems so uniform, so standard, so ordered, this made grace — but I know better, know how the mind can be such a curious mystery, a shy secret we keep from ourselves but know no other form, know the capability of vanities and usury. *I have tried to write Paradise — do not move, let the wind speak (that is paradise).*

Listen as it whispers, across and over these ghostly remains of Eden, our paradise lost. Let the wind's word, these words, tug and tear at your vanities until you too see the light, the darkness, the war and the weary, their return, *this great ball of crystal* before us. *Indeed I cannot lift it, cannot make it cohere, for I am no demigod. But it coheres all right, even if my notes do not cohere.* This vanity, this knowledge, this world, it coheres to you and I for it is you and I, so let us pull it down to know it personally. Let the wind slap you, tear you, jerk your mind into whip-lashed realizations. Let it push and prod these carefully constructed vanities until they fracture and fall away, and we shall remain in the wake of true destruction finally capable of a new creation.

*But is this not too vanity?*

*No. This is not vanity. To have done instead of not doing this is not vanity. Here error is all in the not done, all in the diffidence that faltered.* I do not want to quote you, all who were before me, but damn you I have nothing but that which you have left to

me. I have no eyes capable of such precise sight, no tongue that could express my insides to the outside, *nothing but the errors and wrecks that lie about me* and this VANITY.

Contrarily, then, beauty *is* the madness, the chaos of creation and existence.

And so I question my intelligence, my thoughts, my vanities, and I counter my self, my selves. Why not me, why not now? *I want to learn of this green world that can be my place*, a place over which this *botched civilization* resides for all that matters is but mere matter, significance ascribed by humankind. Imminent glory, inevitable doom: tell me then, what to make of words? *Your eyen two wol sleye me sodenly, I may the beaute of hem not susteyne*. Such words to express such beauty, a vanity, the world, this war. Words from thoughts, from memories, from me and from you and not to be negated as words exist, a vanity all their own, shaping and informing without my input once pen has been put to paper and thus I am known to others in ways unknown (our vanities are one in the same, you see). The determination of reality is but mere speculation, and when you squint or breathe just so it will come, come and go, taking with it all you know. *Whose world, or mine or theirs, or is it of none?* Over the last two hundred and twenty-two years we have seen how retrospect can be a wretched thing, creeping like death in the subconscious, an invisible threat to these divisible vanities. The cracks are beginning to show. Quick! Bring the mirror, the crystal ball, *the great acorn of light*.

I wonder how we will win this war on terror, how much terror this war will win from us. *Let the gods forgive what we have made (again to confess wrong without losing rightness)*. And oh, you are patient; I have seen you sit, hours where something might have floated up, cozy in your caves, your labyrinths, where the light is filtered just so to let a hint of splendor show. Secure tightly these blessings. Hold together this union more perfectly than before and *take thought: I have weathered the storm*. *We have one sap and one root — let there be commerce between*

*us*. Shall we beat out our exile from Eden? *Pro domo, in any case.*

Volume VI

Blake Allen

Alexis Baker

Ronald H. Bayes

Courtney Butler

Blair Garnett

Chella Glennon

Mark Gretch

Alice V-Z Harrison

Jean Jones

Shirley D. Jones

Sarah Karas

Maureen Keathley

Tyler Lee

Joe McGinley

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ISBN: 978-0-9843918-1-3



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